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RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD PROVOST,
THE MAGISTRATES, AND TOWN COUNCIL OF EDINBURGH,
PATRONS OF THE UNIVERSITY.

Edinburgh, 27th Jan. 1846.

MY LORD AND GENTLEMEN,

JUDGING from the efforts produced upon others, I cannot but believe that you must have been much surprised at certain Testimonials in favour of one of the Candidates for the Midwifery Chair, which have recently emanated from the Medical Faculty of the University.

No one will deny that any individual member of that Faculty, whose knowledge of the qualifications of a particular candidate enabled him to bear testimony to his fitness for the appointment, was perfectly entitled to do so. But if it be only the character of *Testimonialists* that the Medical Professors claim to themselves, why, I should be glad to know, have they been so long in coming forward to assume it? Why is it only now, at the eleventh hour, after each Candidate has submitted very fully to the consideration of the Patrons the grounds of his pretensions to this honourable appointment, that the Medical Professors have thought fit to step forward?

I think it must appear to you, from the perusal of these documents, that it is the character, not of *witnesses*, but of *judges*, that the Professors have arrogated to them-

selves on this occasion; that it is not *evidence* which they wish to lay before you, but your *verdict*, which they desire to forestall. If you have any doubts as to the spirit in which these documents have been got up, I beg that you will read over again the Certificate of Professor Syme, and, above all, that Letter which Sir Charles Bell has been so imprudent as to write, and which the friends of one of the Candidates have been so much more imprudent as to publish among his Testimonials, though there be not a single syllable in it that has reference to the qualifications of that Candidate. You will then be able to judge whether these documents are drawn up in the one or in the other of the characters to which I have alluded. The Professors tell you, the Patrons, that you ought to rely on their judgment in a case of this kind, 1st, because they have a superior knowledge of the matter at issue; and 2nd, because it is their interest that the best man should be chosen. Why, then, have not they the nomination? And why do all who have attended to the subject agree in thinking that they ought not to have the nomination? If you will take the trouble to look to the 42nd page of "Report of the Burgh Commissioners, examined by the Town Council of Edinburgh," printed in 1835, you will find the following opinions quoted, relative to the exercise of the patronage of Academic Chairs by the Professors themselves.

"Dr John Thomson.—In particular, I think it highly inexpedient that the patronage of a University should be lodged in the *Professors themselves*; and I am disposed to think that such patronage, as exercised by the Crown, is more exposed to prejudicial influence, and less subject to salutary control, than as exercised by the Town Council."

"Professor Napier.—I would beg to say comparatively, that objectionable as this system is, I would *greatly prefer* it to that where the right of election is vested in

the Professors; and that I would, on the whole, be inclined to have it as it is, rather than vest that right simply in the Crown."

"Dr Brunton.—The worst body of all to vest it in would be *our own body*. The Crown, in exercising such patronage, is liable to the objection of not being so well acquainted with local circumstances as the Town Council."

Lord Cockburn.—'Question. I presume you do not think it worse in this respect than the University of Glasgow? No. There it is done by the Professors; and this I conceive to be beyond all doubt the *worst system* that has yet been devised."

I beg you to ask yourselves whether the persons who gave that evidence (three of them Professors) must not have felt that there are considerations liable to warp the judgment of Professors in the choice of their colleagues, which are more than a counterbalance for any advantages that can be supposed to result from their superior knowledge and apparently more immediate interest; and to consider whether it be not expedient for you to form your own opinions on the evidence before you, rather than have your judgments dictated to you by the Medical Professors. If you read pages 43 and 44 of the same Report, and page 9 of the speech of Bailie Donaldson, by which it is prefaced, you will not be surprised that *some* of the Professors should think you stand in need of guidance on the present occasion, when you see their general estimate of your qualifications for exercising the duty of Patrons.

It is possible that you may not be aware what the *last* occasion was upon which the Medical Faculty of the University gave their *avisamentum* to the Patrons as to the selection of a Professor. I shall therefore take the liberty to bring it under your notice, prefaced as I find it in a pamphlet published in 1837, and understood to have been written by the late Dr Mackintosh. I fear his ob-

servations express too truly the character of the advice which the Patrons have received from the Medical Faculty on all occasions when matters connected with the Medical School have been under consideration.

“Some of the Patrons, in their speeches in the Council, speak a great deal, the writer thinks too much, of the necessity of seeking and following the advice of the professors; and the professors speak a great deal of the interest they must necessarily have in the prosperity of the University, upon which depends the number of their own pupils, and the deep interest they take in the selection of a fit person to fill a vacant chair. Every one conversant with the medical arrangements of this school, knows that the professors in the University have always been the worst advisers of the Town Council, and that they belong to the very last medical body in these kingdoms which has been willing to correct abuses, to improve their curriculum of study, and mode of teaching.

“One example out of many may be quoted in which the professors succeeded, by means like the present, in translating Dr Home from the chair of *Materia Medica* to that of *Pathology and Practice of Physic*, so ably filled by his predecessor, Dr Gregory; and it is a curious fact, well worthy of the deliberate consideration of the Council, that this letter was believed to be penned for the express purpose of disappointing the hopes of some of the most eminent men in Great Britain, among whose names stand those of Dr Abercrombie and Dr Thomson.

“To the Right Honourable the Lord Provost of Edinburgh.

June 2, 1821.

“My Lord,

As your Lordship has communicated your particular desire that we, Professors of Medicine in the University, should express our opinion of the qualifica-

tions of Dr Home to fill the chair of the Practice of Physic, we have great pleasure in complying with this request. We beg leave to premise, that as the number of our own Students depends upon the prosperity of the University, there are no individuals so deeply interested as we are in the selection of a fit person to fill this Chair, so important to the Medical School.

“We have no hesitation in stating that the opportunities which Dr Home has had of acquiring an accurate knowledge of the Practice of Physic, have been of the most extensive and advantageous kind, and of these he has availed himself to the utmost: That the teaching of Materia Medica and Clinical Medicine, in which Dr Home has been so long engaged, necessarily requires a correct and minute acquaintance with the practical part of the science, which we know Dr Home to possess in a very eminent degree; and that we consider the gradual and very great increase in the number of Students of Materia Medica since he became professor, as the most decided and satisfactory proof of his ability and popularity as a teacher.

“We may be permitted to add our thorough conviction that the labours of Dr Home have had their full share in maintaining the fame of the Medical School, *and we entertain no doubt, that they will continue to preserve it undiminished, should your Lordship and the other Patrons confer upon him the honourable situation of Professor of the Practice of Physic, to which he aspires.*

We have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient Servants,

ANDREW DUNCAN, Sen.
THO. C. HOPE
ALEX. MONRO.
JAMES HAMILTON.
ROBERT GRAHAM.

“The writer need not say a word more on the subject,
as he believes the Council will give him credit for silence.”

Following Dr Mackintosh's example in this respect,

I have the honour to subscribe myself,

My Lord and Gentlemen,

Your most obedient Servant,

A. BURGESS.